

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) and Rep. Steven LaTourette (R-OH), along with more than 40 House colleagues, introduced the Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act of 2003. Senators Kennedy (D-MA) and Kerry (D-MA) are introducing companion legislation in the Senate. The legislation is endorsed by all of the major organizations representing nurses including: the ANA, SEIU, AFSCME, AFT, AFGE, UAW and AFL-CIO.

The Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act will protect quality patient care and stem the growing shortage of nurses across our country by strictly limiting forced mandatory overtime for nurses.

"Forcing nurses to work mandatory overtime is dangerous for patients and it is driving nurses out of the profession," Stark said. "These twin realities make mandatory overtime a risky short-term gamble at best. Its time for us to put limits on the ability of hospitals and other health care providers to continue this unsafe practice."

The Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act would allow nurses to continue to volunteer for overtime if and when they feel they can continue to provide safe, quality care. Mandatory overtime, however, would only be allowed when an official state of emergency is declared by federal, state or a local government. These limits would be part of Medicare's provider agreements. The bill would not apply to nursing homes since there are alternative staffing and quality measures moving forward for those facilities.

The legislation would also provide HHS with new tools to enforce these standards. It would also protect nurses from discrimination by employers who continue to force them into working hours beyond what they believe safe for quality care.

"This bill will give nurses the flexibility they need so they can work overtime if they feel suited to the task and also turn down overtime when they are being stretched too thin and worry they might jeopardize patient care," LaTourette said. "We don't allow truckers to drive when they're dead tired and we shouldn't force nurses to work when they're weary and exhausted. That's an irresponsible and potentially fatal way to address our nursing shortage."

"Protecting patients and rebuilding our nurse workforce shouldn't be a partisan issue. That's why I'm especially pleased we are introducing a bipartisan bill today. Rep. LaTourette and I look forward to working with our colleagues and our nation's nurses to enact legislation to

protect patients and nurses alike. The Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act is an important component of such efforts,” concluded Rep. Stark.